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**The Iowa Blind History Archive  
History of Blindness in Iowa - Oral History Project  
Interview with [Name]  
Conducted by [Name]  
[Date]  
Transcribed by [Name]**

**NOTE: Any text included in brackets [ ] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.**

**Mike Hoenig, age 47, Davenport, Iowa  
Louise Duvall  
Iowa Department for the Blind  
4-15-11  
Second Interview**

**Louise Duvall: I believe when we left off last time, you were talking about an opportunity had come up in Field Operations for you to be the Home Teacher in Southeast**

**Iowa, which is where your family was. You want to take it from there?**

**Mike Hoenig: Sure. I did that. I was really grateful. As much as I enjoyed working up in Northwest Iowa, my roots and my family, I had a number of family members, including my parents and a number of relatives in Southeast Iowa; and had gone to school in Iowa City. So, I took the opportunity.**

**I was given the transfer and so worked, I don't remember exactly how many counties it was. But, maybe 14 in Southeast Iowa, going from Newton all the way down to the Missouri border, and then all the way east; with the exception, didn't have Davenport, but I did have Muscatine and Burlington, Keokuk, Fort Madison, Keokuk all the way down to the border there. Just a humorous little incident; the first client that I called on was in...Oh no, that was back out West, but I'll still tell it. I got to the door, went in and the wife said, "Mike, get back." And, I thought oh, I'm off on the wrong foot. And, it turned out that Mike was their dog.**

**But, yeah, I was in Southeast Iowa for, let's see, I left, I think I was in Southeast Iowa for just under two years. I left employment with the agency in September of '89, I believe. And, I believe the time was split fairly evenly between Northwest and Southeast Iowa; had developed some really good client relationships down there. Not that I would have ever...I don't know what would have happened if people would, maybe, have found out that I did a little bit of socializing with some of the clients after. I had one in particular that she decided it was her mission to teach me to play Bridge. So, we would gather, sometimes have dinner, and we would gather and play cards well late into the night. And, that lady still happens to be alive, and I saw**

her about a year ago, which was kind of neat. So, it was a good time, but I did decide...I had done my internship in Davenport. I can't remember if I mentioned that in the last history, but really liked the area and decided that I wanted to move there.

And, a job came open with the state of Illinois. And, I should have known that something was not going to work very well, because I had been tentatively offered the job, and they said it's only a matter of a week or two. So, I began pulling off the road and trying to get the files all in order. And, it ended up, I think, being closer to two months before the official offer came. By then, I think, I thought I was keeping a deep dark secret. And, I think pretty much everybody knew what was going on. And, finally I had to...I went to Dianne Weinman and said, "Got a little bit of a problem here." And she, she should have said you're going to have to make a decision here. And, then within the week they finally did come through with the offer. And so, I moved to the Quad Cities and had a short stint with the Department of Rehab. there. And that could be a whole other...

Duvall: I'd forgotten that. So, you worked for the Illinois Department of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Hoenig: I did. It was actually called Doors. Illinois Department of Rehab., and then it was within the Bureau of Blind Services. I was there for six whole months.

Duvall: Would that just be like your probationary period?

Hoenig: It would, as a matter of fact.

**Duvall: What happened?**

**Hoenig: You know, I think a number of things happened. And, I could probably spend an hour on this but I won't. But, I believe that during...One of the reasons for the delay in actually hiring me was that in the time that I had been tentatively offered the job, shortly after that, I believe, that someone who had connections wanted the job; and had the opportunity to leverage what she needed to do. And, they couldn't really rescind the offer. But, I knew I had a problem on the first day. The office was in one of those little strip malls, and I had to go, I wanted to go grab a sandwich and they said, "We'll drive you but we're not going to show you where it is." And I said, "Well, I'll figure it out on my own then." So, as you know, my Iowa skills taught me to do. And, by the time I did find it and got a sandwich and got back I was ten minutes late, and I got written up on the first day. And, it just kind of went down hill from there.**

**Duvall: They didn't plan to keep you.**

**Hoenig: I believe that to be true. I went out...My first client that I went to see was in her early 70s, was losing vision very quickly. The Department here had been gracious enough to loan me some Jacksonville Series books, and I took it in there. And, she was really fascinated, and she thought she wanted to start learning Braille. And, I wrote up the case note, and I got called in and was told that I hadn't even done a Low Vision Eval. on this person, and that I had no business teaching her Braille. I got written up one time because I was loading up the car on a week day, and that I should have come in on Sunday. And, that was not expected**

**of anyone else. And it just, I believe that there was someone, once I was told that...When I was here, my performance evaluations consistently were, you know, in the three to four range, out of a five point scale. And, after the six month probationary period there were eight indicators of which I was told that on all eight I needed improvement. And, you just don't go from being a decent teacher to a terrible teacher in a six month period. And, I was told that, you know, I would either, that they would give me the time to look for another job and I could resign, or they would terminate me. So, I chose to go look for another job and interestingly enough when I left, they had a person in place within less than a month. And, the Rehabilitation Teacher Supervisor, there are many, many layers in the state of Illinois. In my exit interview, [she] told me that she had been a Rehab. Teacher for 20 years and that I was; she had observed me on a few occasions, and she told me that I was a better teacher than she ever had been.**

**Duvall: But, she's not the one who did your performance eval.?**

**Hoenig: No, it was the person above her. But, I think even by that time she had nothing to lose by saying that, because you know, I had left and I hadn't chosen to join the union. And so, I didn't have any backing. And, I think even if I had, you know, you don't want to stay in a hostile environment, or I didn't. So, it was a parting.**

**And, I went to work for the Illinois-Iowa Center for Independent Living then. And, that was; for those people who don't know what a center is, they are a non-residential, non-profit community based, cross-disability organization.**

**And, the center in the Quad Cities was rather unique in that it offered services specifically to blind persons. Most of them they would have an Independent Living Specialist and they would say yeah we serve all disabilities. But, this particular center has a Blind Services Program. And, you know, I liked it. It was a step back in pay, a big one. And, I got involved with some advocacy in both Iowa and Illinois, working in the education system, and with Social Security in a number of venues such as that. And, it was a very, it was kind of a new movement. It was just getting started in Iowa.**

**There had been centers in Illinois for quite a number of years, but Iowa was new and it came to pass that, and I'm trying to remember, the history of this, and I don't know that I'm going to. But in 1990, I think, it was the Rehabilitation Act which funds Voc. Rehab., and Independent Living and a number of other things Rehab.-related, was reauthorized. And, prior to that there were Title 7 funds, and Title 7 is the title that funds independent living programs. And, they were supposed to serve, again, multiple disabilities. Well, Iowa, and I don't know if any other states, interpreted the law this way, but Iowa said fine. The Department for the Blind we have. We can set up the independent living program. We can serve multiple disabled individuals, which was a requirement. You had to be cross-disability and it just so happens that all of them will have the common disability of being blind, but we will use this money to serve multiple disabilities. And, there was also a separate pool of money, I believe, that was at that time called 7C, that was used for elderly blind.**

**So, the Department was running its Independent Living Program, and interestingly enough, it's the program that I started my career working for. And, because of the**

**reauthorized Rehabilitation Act, there was a real move afloat to shift the funding from the Department to Centers for Independent Living across the state. Then they were supposedly going to provide blindness related services with that Title 7 money that here-to-for had only been utilized by the Department. Well, I got caught up in the thing and I decided that, gee, this is the way to go. You know, you're kind of redefining your, or I was redefining my career, and kind of had a bad incident with Illinois, obviously. I decided that that was going to be a much better use of funds than the Department could use, and decided that, gosh, all these centers are just going to bring a person on board that is going to know how to serve blind guys, and they'll be able to see them every week, and they'll be able to control their services. It was, you know, I got caught up in it and actually, in a couple of occasions, went to Des Moines, invaded the Independent Living Advisory Committee meeting with the Independent Living Center folks, and really made it pretty miserable for some people. You know, I think that the thing for some reason stands out in my mind more than anything about the whole thing that happened, was that one of the people who at that time I think was serving as a chair of that committee, was someone that when I traveled in the state as a Rehab. Teacher often hosted me in his home when I would come to that part of the state. And, we just flustered him so much at one point that he tossed his stylus across the room and said, "I don't know, I just..." And, that always has stuck with me. I think when...**

**So, then the money did end up going to the centers, the money that had been used by the Department started going to the centers. And, I think I had already started to realize that this was a mistake. I certainly didn't feel that I could**

**ever show my face in the Department or, you know, I had been a member of ICUB for many years and, you know, I can't do that anymore. So, that was already bothering me and then I started really realizing what a mistake it was just from a programmatic stand point for blind people in the state, because I had already started to figure out the centers were just not, didn't have the quality of services.**

**15:00**

**Hoenig: And, they certainly didn't have people that had the know-how to serve blind people. And, then I started hearing these things about, you know, people in the areas where the centers were located were calling, and the centers started referring people back to Becky at the Department, or maybe you, Louise. I can't remember who was getting the calls, but somebody in Independent Living anyway. And, I thought, you know, and of course, you look back on it a few years later and you think, well, of course that's what was going to happen. But, you get caught up in it and you make some pretty bad decisions. And so, it took me, I think, a long time for me to start feeling that maybe I could some day, you know, come back to the Department. It took a lot of people I think, a long time to feel that they could trust me, at any level; which, I mean, for good reason. I mean, it was not a pleasant battle or a pleasant, you know, some of the things that I said, you know. You can't take words back once they're out of your mouth. So, yeah, that was not a very productive or pleasant time in my career; something that I was very proud of. You know, people are pretty forgiving and over the course of time things started to change I think. I can't remember what year it was somewhere in the late**



**90s when I decided maybe it would be okay to try to show up at an ICUB convention. I can remember at one point somebody suggested that I be on the board, and that was, like, after a year, or two. And, a couple of our long time members of the Council said, "It's not ready yet," or "It's not time yet," or something; and you can imagine who said that. (Laughter) So, it's been a long haul. I guess, I certainly learned a lot from it. You know, if I had to do it all over again I, obviously, I wouldn't have gone that direction. Having done so, I think, it makes you grow up; it makes you start thinking about getting caught up in causes and things that...And, it also, it made me, I guess, ultimately realize where my loyalty was. And, I think the one thing that, you know, I mentioned the gentleman with the stylus a while ago. I know one thing that I do regret is that I never did have the opportunity to talk to him about it. And, I believe at some point, you know, he moved out of state, and is not in good health. So, I'm not sure that it will ever happen.**

**Duvall: I think he's gone.**

**Hoenig: Is he?**

**Duvall: Yeah.**

**Hoenig: So, you know, that was...And, I just hope that somewhere along the way somebody, you know, passed my regrets on to him, because they were wonderful people. When, you know, every time I would come out to that area, which for a while was about once a month, and we'd get together and have pizza, or go out or sometimes just chat on the phone. And, you know, particularly when you're young**

**and you're just getting your feet on the ground in a territory, it was really a great thing to have that kind of support, I guess.**

**Duvall: Everybody knew him. Can't we name his name?**

**Hoenig: Can we?**

**Duvall: I don't see why not.**

**Hoenig: Oh, okay. I wasn't sure where the confidentiality thing was, but it was Wyman Howard.**

**Duvall: Yes. He was a very dear man and he put up with being President of the Independent Living Advisory Committee because he liked us. I mean, that was a personal thing in his eyes. He liked the people long before he was totally convinced that the Department was a good place. He kind of belonged to that really old school that had fought with Mr. Jernigan years, and years ago and stuff like that. And so, he and Shirley and John Powers, and I can't even remember all of the people.**

**Hoenig: Stratton.**

**Duvall: Yes, of course. They all, I believe, became good supporters of the Department because they had good, positive relationships with the Independent Living people.**

**Hoenig: Oh, I think that's true. And, I think that's, you know, when the split happened, let's see, was it the Associated Blind for a year or two, and then that became the**

**United Blind of Iowa, but they were separated. They had left the NFB. And then there was talk, let's see, what is this our, is it the 23? Anyway, in the late '80s there began to be talk of merger between ICUB or at that time it was the Iowa Council and the United Blind of Iowa. And there were many of those people that you just mentioned that had no interest what-so-ever in having that happen originally. And, I think that the Department, and specifically the Independent Living connection, made a big difference in that; that they realized that, you know, Shirley was by that time involved with the committee, the advisory committee. I think Wyman was.**

**Duvall: John Powers.**

**Hoenig: Oh, that's right.**

**Duvall: They all were. They liked us.**

**Hoenig: Yeah. So, for me that was because, you know, I'm kind of a different breed, maybe, than a lot of people my age in that, I really, I've always connected with seniors. And, a lot of those people, when I would go to convention, I think part of it was a mentoring thing. Part of it was, you know, that I was always interested in hearing their stories. And so, I was not really in the "in crowd" of that group, because you know just the age difference and everything. But, I always felt very respected and welcomed. And so, obviously that, you know, when I did take a walk on the dark side, that changed. One of the, Bob Stratton, I guess, since I can say names.**

**Duvall: Yeah, he's gone too.**

**Hoenig: He and Rose always had a little, they live in Maquoketa, and they always had a little, they had a cottage out, oh I don't know, maybe 30 40 miles from Maquoketa in an area called Leisure Lake. And, I knew they had this big summer party at Leisure Lake. You'd always hear about it. And, you know, I always as a younger man, always thought boy I hope some day I can make that happen. And, then when my own personal schism or whatever happened in the '90s, thought, well, that will never happen. And then, I don't know, finally, you know, over the course of time with ICUB and, you know, Bob and I started getting a little friendly again. And, one time after...Shirley always does the memorial service on Sunday morning, and Bob said, "Let's escape and go have breakfast." "Oh boy, that sounds a whole lot better than sitting in the convention." So, that became a tradition. And, then one time, we always rode home together, and one time we were about half way home and all of [a sudden] Bob says, "Here, read this later." And, he had written something out on a piece of paper, on a little note card on his slate. And, I thought okay. So, I couldn't wait and read it later; I had to read it right then. But, I knew immediately why I was supposed to read it later, because I wasn't supposed to talk about it then. It was my invitation to the Leisure Lake and the summer picnic. And, there were people in the van that weren't invited to it. But anyway, that was my time when I knew that I had reached the pinnacle; that I was back in and that I was invited to the summer picnic. So, I was pretty thrilled about that. And, I got to go to, I don't know, two or three of them before Bob and Rose sold the property. And, now Bob's gone but Rose is still very much alive.**

**Duvall: Yes, she is! Well, how long did you work for the Center for Independent Living?**

**Hoenig: I worked for them for three and a half years. Started in March, no, February, I guess, of '90, and left in September of '93. I had an opportunity to go to work for the University of Iowa, coordinating an advocacy training program there. And, I had made that connection through the center, and decided that that was something that I'd really like to do, and I'm still there.**

**Duvall: I see. So, that wasn't just a grant?**

**Hoenig: It was actually. That's how I got hired there. And it was a three-year grant and then it got renewed for a year. And, then it got renewed for a second three-year term, and then I started being asked to do a couple of other grant programs. And, I'm not sure how long. I didn't really expect it would be this long. Things have really changed now and there's a lot more emphasis on raising funds, raising your own funds, specifically.**

**Duvall: Pay your own salary.**

**Hoenig: Pay your own salary. And, I just met with my boss yesterday, interestingly enough. And, I guess, this is okay to put in the history because, I mean, it's a part we all go through evolutions in our life, you know. And, when I first was there one of the things that really attracted me to the job was not only did I do the self-advocacy training and so forth, but there was a lot of flexibility. And he saw, as did a**

**number of my co-workers at that time, the real value of getting out and educating the community. And so, anything that you could do to get a foot in the door and represent, you know, the center, well at that time it was called the University Affiliated Program, but to represent our program was seen as a real good PR thing. And, it was good to educate people, you know. So, I built up quite a group of school districts and other opportunities to, you know, where you would go out and present on disability. And, of course, I would always take the opportunity to bring my blindness tools. And, over the course of time that has really decreased.**

**Duvall: Decreased?**

**Hoenig: Decreased, yes. So, at one point I actually had a little amount of funding because I obviously needed a driver that. When I needed, whether it was for a school district, or we had a group that we funded in Spencer and I connected with them right away and so they would invite me to come up and help them with their disability day. And, we'd always find a creative excuse to make that happen. And so, eventually the funding for drivers to do those kinds of things disappeared, you know, because there haven't been a lot of increases and there's been a real change in focus in our program, from more of that training to more of what you would call infrastructure development, strategic planning and that kind of thing that happens. Our agency and the Department of Human Services have many contracts and partnerships now, and that is not my forte. And so, I've actually, on a few occasions, still have been able to do some of the school outreach, because I have friends that teach**

**and say, “Oh, we’ll come get you.” So or, you know, on a few occasions I’ve actually paid my driver because I just, I find it to be one of the most valuable things we as blind people can do is to teach, you know, to talk with young people about what we can do and so. But anyway, I met with my boss yesterday and he said that you really need to curtail that outreach some more, and that you really need to spend at least twenty percent of your time on raising your own funds. And so, I’m just really, I’ve started actually putting out some feelers. I thought at one point, maybe, that I would be able to stick it out and retire from the University. And, I guess that’s still a possibility. I mean, if things would turn around, or if I would find some grant funding that would allow me to be back out in the field. But, I just, I am not cut out to sit behind a desk for eight hours a day. You know, I think that that’s becoming more and more the expectations. So, I’m feeling like I’m kind of at a little bit of a crossroads, I guess. You know, am I going to make a change or?**

**Duvall: Can you piggyback in on any of the Dennis Maki Masters in Rehab PHD and in Vocational Rehabilitation, any of those?**

**Hoenig: You mean to go back to, to school?**

**Duvall: No, as a presenter.**

**Hoenig: Yeah, I have done some of that. And, if it’s within the University they do allow some of that, too, but they’ve kind of gone the route; Dennis and then another one, Vilia, over there kind of developed a relationship with the Independent Living Center. So, they often have, I don’t know**

**if you know Keith Ruff; he's been there for years and years and he also graduated from that program.**

**30:00**

**Hoenig: And, a lot of times he's, I think, is asked to go do that. You know, I might have to try to rekindle that a little bit because that is a neat opportunity to work with those students.**

**Duvall: I've never been that pleased with how Vilia and Dennis have made use of blindness as part of their overall curriculum.**

**Hoenig: I don't, you know, I guess I don't remember a lot about how do they not address it at all. Or do they? You know, I don't really remember.**

**Duvall: Oh, it's probably best that we not put this on record.**

**Hoenig: Okay.**

**Duvall: I'm out of the business, so I guess my opinion doesn't really matter anymore, but anyway.**

**Hoenig: I do know that, and this I can say for the history because its blindness related in that, when, well, to be fair I probably shouldn't have gone to grad school right away. I was 20 and I had a lot of maturity issues, you know, I was, you know, as I look back on it. But, there it was and I had the opportunity and I went. And so, I struggled with the pressure of it, but one of the things that happened is that I**



think that there was a pretty low expectation of me, and there were issues. For instance, I remember that there was a work sample that everybody was supposed to complete so that we would have a sense of what it was going to be like. Dennis said, "Oh, you don't have to do that." And so, then when I, I mean, I was never hospitalized but I had some kind of mental health anxiety kinds of issues that I really thought about whether I might have to check myself in. And, of course, that probably fed his belief that maybe blind people couldn't cut it. And, when I did I honestly think that...We haven't gone here at all either, but you know, when I came to work here I got recruited to get involved with the IRA, the Iowa Rehab Association. And, I'll never forget one time I was at the annual conference and somebody, we were talking or something, and you had a group of us, and I said that, oh, I was going to go get a drink, does anybody want one. Well, two or three other people did, so there I was with my cane, carrying about three glasses of booze or whatever it was over to the table. And, Dave Quick came up to me and said, "You just educated more people in this room by doing what you just did than any amount of speeches that any of us could do." And I thought, never thought about that. But, you know, I guess just the idea that I'm capable of being the one to go get the stuff.

So anyway, it was during that convention, that conference, that Dennis actually came up to me and said, "When are you going to get your ass out of school?" And, I thought, he actually thinks I can make this. That was the first time that I really had a sense that he thought I was a capable person. And, that was a real motivator to me to go and get done. I did a research paper, and then I did my Comps and got done. But, that was interesting that there

**was a real sense of, you know, gosh we got a blind person here. And, then I think, unfortunately, somebody had gone there before me, that hadn't had a particularly good experience. And so, you know, there were some preconceived notions there.**

**Duvall: Yes. All right, well, you know, we've touched on several things about the various jobs that you've had over the years, and they all seem to, in their own way, deal with advocacy. And, I was thinking earlier today. You know, we ought to go on record now that you are one of the Commissioners here; one of the three people appointed by the Governor to influence the policies and procedures, and to hire and evaluate the Director. And, that's probably, I was going to say, one of the most powerful positions as an advocate that you could have. Do you disagree with that or?**

**Hoenig: No, I do think that's, I think that's true. It is an interesting position to be in, because you know, none of us have, there's been a long history with a few broken lines in here. But, I think there's been a real sense of not wanting to micro-manage here and certainly, you know, being three hours away, I don't always have a pulse on what's going on here. And, often times it gets real, you feel in some senses, yes, it's a very powerful opportunity. But, sometimes you almost feel powerless, because you know, you're getting input that you don't know how valid it is. You don't know where it...There often times are things, like, well, you know. I know that people aren't happy with bla bla bla, and it sometimes is a real challenge to know how to deal with that, because you know, its not my place to go out and start seeking those people out and saying, okay are you one of**

**the people that's not, you know, what's your problem or what's your issue.**

**And, you know, I see a Director right now that, you know, I feel is doing a whole lot of work to try to, you know, to do some things that we had to have done with our numbers; with our, you know, just our image, with our outreach. And yet, you know, still not a hundred percent of the people are a hundred percent happy. And so, you know, knowing how to strike that balance. You know one of the things that I see my role as being is to, you know, we hired a Director, and our role is to support that person as board members. But also, if there are issues that are a concern to the public, which is also who we're serving, you know, to address those. I would say that it's been a good growing experience for me to be on the board. I came at a time when there was another Director here who, politically, I didn't agree with. And, I think, you know, I spent some time probably getting more partisan than one ought to do; at least in meetings, talking about my alliance to a particular organization, rather than sticking to the facts. And so, you know, it's certainly been a learning experience and will continue to be as we move forward with a new Commissioner.**

**Duvall: That's right. Do you have any interaction with the Governor?**

**Hoenig: I do not.**

**Duvall: Once you get appointed do you ever hear from him again?**

**Hoenig: Well, I guess I had some interaction with the Governor's office. Well, the first formal interaction was that we all had to go through a training process that was organized by the Governor's office.**

**Duvall: As new Commissioners.**

**Hoenig: Right. And so, we learned about a number of things, about state government, and I think, actually, Governor Culver was a part of that. I had had interaction with, in fact that's probably how I got appointed, was that I had worked with him when he was Secretary of State on the Help America Vote Act Committee. And so, he said when he became Governor that, you know, that he wanted, he actually scheduled a time to visit with me. And, it was before I became Commissioner. And he said, you know, "Is there anything I can do for you?" And, I had thought about applying; some people had encouraged me to do that. And I said, "Well, you know, I'm thinking about doing this, and I'd sure appreciate it if you'd consider my application favorably," and he did. So, but afterward, no, I really didn't interact with him on Commission business. I had a couple of occasions to contact somebody in the AG's office and we met, you know. In fact, I think I contacted somebody in the Governor's office with a question once, but him personally? No. Not after that initial interaction.**

**Duvall: Well, I was just personally curious rather, you know, the Governor; do they deal directly with the Director, or they send like their Chief of Staff over to deal with the Director? Or do they ever call up the Commissioner and say, "I appointed you and I expect you to support me." You know?**

**Hoenig:** You know that never happened with the Governor. Well, I did get calls from his staff that said we're having a rally at such and such a time. We hope you can make it. But, there was never any connection drawn back to my being appointed as a Commissioner to that. I do believe that, I don't know how much interaction Karen had with the Governor. I do believe that Allen made it his business to get to know him. And then, of course, one of the Commission meetings, I believe, that the disability person, and his name is just gone out of my head. It was kind of a disability contact with the Governor's office, came to a Commission meeting shortly after he was placed into that position. No, and I have had no dealings with the current administration, you know, no one in there.

**Duvall:** Now, when will your term be up?

**Hoenig:** It will be...

**Duvall:** Are they three-year terms?

**Hoenig:** Three-year terms, and I believe that I still have two more years. It's May first, I believe. I was appointed in '07, I think. So, that would be...And, then I was reappointed in '10, so that would be two more years. And, that's an interesting process, too. I mean, you reapply and you don't really know. You kind of think its going to be a foregone conclusion, but as we have recently seen.

**Duvall:** Yes, things can be highly flexible.

**Hoenig: Yes, they can.**

**Duvall: All right. Well, let's see was there...Oh, I guess this is, the only thing I was thinking of, Mike, was, I wondered about if you would just share with me some of the stories of your travel experiences? I was thinking about back in the days when you used to go to Sioux City you had to take the bus.**

**Hoenig: The bus. It's kind of, I was thinking about that as I was wandering through the rain today; another bus story. Well, I guess, when I first traveled up to North West Iowa I would take the bus up there because I chose to live in Des Moines. Had gotten an apartment here and I thought, well, I'm not going to move again so what I usually did was take the bus. I would work here, get ready for the week, and there was a bus that left Des Moines here around 5 o'clock. No, maybe it was later than that. Anyway, I think it would get out to Omaha at eight or nine at night. And, then you were supposed to connect to a little jack rabbit bus that would go into Sioux City. Well, there were two times that the connection didn't get made. And, I spent the night in the Omaha bus depot. And, I think I remember calling you, actually, the first time that it happened. And, you know, you just don't get a whole lot of sleep at the Omaha bus depot.**

**Duvall: I was just thinking I wouldn't want to sleep in the bus depot.**

**Hoenig: Scary!**

**Duvall: Yes.**

**Hoenig:** And, I think I called you, it was like eight in the morning, and told you. And I said, “Now, really would it be okay if I went and got some sleep?” And, “Yes.” You called my people and said, “We’re going to have to reschedule or something.” So, I had that happen and then we got that, you made an arrangement, allowed me to go over, I think, to Omaha and my Sioux City driver would come down. So, we did that and then probably even a more interesting, or equally interesting, was you know, you just you grow up; you learn. And, I had a driver that was from here and we traveled into Eastern Iowa by then, and it became apparent to me, well, he asked to borrow some money and I was stupid enough to loan it to him. And, I was deciding that, you know, one of the ways that I’m going to get this back is just to not pay him.

**45:00**

**Hoenig:** Well, he, let’s see. And, it was late. So, he was, I discovered that he was an alcoholic. So, it was time to move on. But, I decided that I was just not...Every week we would settle up at the end of the week, and I think he knew something was going on. So, that particular night he said, “I think I want to settle up with you tonight.” And I said, “No, I don’t have the cash.” “Well, I’ll take you to the ATM.” “No, I don’t...” He said, “You’re not going to pay me are you?” And I didn’t respond right away and he said, “Then I think it’s time for me to leave.” So, here I was in the Iowa City hotel, wherever it was that we stayed that night, and he left.

**Duvall:** And, you were abandoned.

**Hoenig: I was abandoned! And, I had clients to see the next day and I had stuff and, you know, all my supplies and everything like that. So, I don't remember exactly what I did. I think I had to abandon ship. I think I had clients out in the country in the rural areas that day, and I think we had to reschedule, and I took the bus home. And, then I had another driver for a while, that he was not one that you wanted to have around other people. He never knew. One time he took me down to Burlington and we had a support group meeting. Picked up one of the leaders of the support group, who's just real cheery, wonderful person and she said, got in the car and said, "How you doing Fred?" He said, "Oh, I'm going blind." And she just started laughing and I said, "Oh don't worry, Maxine, we'll make it." I think she thought, well, this isn't very good. We have two blind people in the front and me in the back. The driver's blind. So he...My driving, I didn't always do a good job of selecting drivers. But, getting stranded in Iowa City was quite the experience.**

**Duvall: You know, those are the kind of experiences that we need to talk about because we don't want the general public to think that its easy to find a compatible personality who is reliable and knows their left and their right apart and, you know, can follow directions, and all that kind of thing; that finding a good driver is a very fortuitous experience. And, that things go wrong, but once you survive it, I mean, once you've had missed your connection and, you know, you're awake all night and stuff, then you know the next time you just call in and head for a hotel and have a nap.**



**Hoenig: Yep.**

**Duvall: Or if you are abandoned in Iowa City, you could call the, I don't know the Cedar Rapids district office, and see if anybody up there had any suggestions about drivers. You know, I don't know those are just some of the things that to survive it is to make you stronger.**

**Hoenig: Oh yeah, you know. And, every driver taught you well. I eventually...Roger, when Roger moved into Des Moines to take over the BEP program, his driver actually lived out in South Dakota. And, I had met him when I traveled with Roger. And Roger said, "You're not going to believe this, but Casey wants to drive for you." And I said, "No way!" I said, "We're going to have to tell him that," or I think I said, "Well, you're going to have to tell him that he's not going to get paid to come from South Dakota to Des Moines." And he said, "He's not my driver anymore." "You're going to have to tell him." (Laughter) So, I did and he did. He would come down here in the middle of the night and camp out at the Department. And, they finally, you know, we made an arrangement where he could come in and, you know, or whatever after people got to know him. But, the thing that he taught me was, well, he didn't know; always before I had pretty much relied on the driver to find places, you know, this is the address. And, we'd get to Iowa City and he'd say, "Okay, well, I know we're supposed to get on highway 6; I don't know where highway 6 is." And, you know it finally hit me. Well, geeze, you know, I'm employing him; it's my job to...**

**Duvall: Tell him where to go.**

**Hoenig: Yeah, it is. And so, you know, I started, and that has served me very well. You know, even in this job, when I do have to, the job that I have now, when I have to have a driver. Some of them actually, interestingly enough, now, with the GPS and everything and Map Quest, they prefer to get their own directions. But I always, you know, say, “Would you like me to get the directions?” Or sometimes one driver will even, will say, “Just let me get the directions. I like to do it a certain way.” Well, fine, but it’s always top in my mind now. You know, I’m the one that’s responsible ultimately for, you know...**

**Duvall: If they don’t do it, or forget, or whatever, I better have a backup.**

**Hoenig: Yep. Absolutely! So, that was the lesson that Casey taught me however many years ago. (Laughter)**

**Duvall: Well, one of the things that I found very interesting in my knowledge of you and the things that you do, was your trip to Russia. What year was that? Do you remember?**

**Hoenig: ’88? Let’s see, I have to think about that. Was I still here?**

**Duvall: Yes, you must have been because how else would I know about it?**

**Hoenig: Yeah, I guess. I think it was ’88. It was not real long before I left here.**

**Duvall: Tell me about how you got, how you found the tour and, you know, decided that you were going to go.**

**Hoenig: I got a mailing from an organization called Professional Seminar Consultants. And, they were advertising this tour. And, I have no idea how they found me, but it was supposedly to learn about serving people with head injuries. And you know, at that time, we were starting to get more and more folks with head injuries. And I thought, well, this would be a good learning experience, and gosh, I think I'd like to go to Russia. And, what possessed me to keep following through on it, I don't know. It just felt like it was something I needed to do.**

**Duvall: Because it turned out to be more of a sight-seeing tour.**

**Hoenig: Much more of a sight...You know, and I thought why, you know, we were so far ahead of what they were doing.**

**Duvall: I remember you reporting back about a couple of the institutions that you...**

**Hoenig: Oh, dreadful! And, really it was...they billed it as this learning tour and it was. And, they had a professor that gave lectures, if I remember right. But, in many cases, you know, they were about practices that were going on here in the United States, so I don't know. I mean, it was another good experience for me. But, one of the things was that they were going to require me to sign a waiver or to have a person with me.**

**Duvall: Sighted guide.**

**Hoenig: Yep. And, it turned out that they matched us up with roommates based on the letter of the alphabet. And, my roommate was a Rehab Counselor who was living, at that time, in Alabama, but had worked in Illinois for many years. And we, you know, ended up hitting it off. And, that's been a fairly typical thing you know; if you're blind, you can't travel independently.**

**Duvall: Well, I was thinking that you got to see the, how do they pronounce that, Hermitage?**

**Hoenig: Yeah, I did and I think.**

**Duvall: That's a big museum in St. Petersburg.**

**Hoenig: St. Petersburg, and boy, I do remember going to Red Square in Moscow. I remember going to...**

**Duvall: Lennon's tomb?**

**Hoenig: Did we? I remember there were a number of mausoleums that we went to. I remember in the last night going to; we had a choice of the symphony or the ballet, and I chose the symphony. And, it turned out I was the only one. And, I remember a person coming up and talking to me and she said she was a teacher; she taught English as a second language. And, she showed me where to sit, and then she said, "Are you okay?" And I said, "Yeah." And she said, "Are you sure you don't know anything?" (Laughter) She was all**

**embarrassed because she meant need. But, I definitely remember that. And, I also remember going into Central Asia. There were three cities in Uzbekistan we visited. And, just such a different atmosphere; the warmer temperature, you almost felt like you were in the Middle East. You'd hear the Muslim, you know, the call to worship, the smells of the, like, the kabobs out on the street. There were snake charmers and just, you knew you were in a very foreign place.**

**Duvall: Well, you were pretty young, let's see...**

**Hoenig: About 25.**

**Duvall: About 25.**

**Hoenig: 24? Because I think we were over there in April and in the early part of May. And, I believe it was '88 because in '89 I left.**

**Duvall: Well, anything else that you think we ought to know about you or your stories?**

**Hoenig: You know one of the things that I've always have found this to be ironic, considering that I've, you know, I've been in the ACB or American Council of the Blind since I don't know early 80s. I got recruited when I was in Vinton. The thing that...The very first thing that I ever remember my parents talking about blindness, was Kenneth Jernigan. And, you have to keep in mind that they, neither of my parents went to high school, weren't particularly well read, all those kinds of things. But, something...Kenneth Jernigan**

and Florence Grannis apparently used to do road trips and for whatever reason, they were in Burlington one night. And, I'm not sure how it would have even been that Mom and Dad would have been convinced to go. Maybe it was the fact that it was advertized that Kenneth Jernigan was blind, but they just thought the world of that. They came back to, you know, I was only about four-years-old so I'm amazed that I can still remember it. It was before I started school, I think. But, they talked about this man named Mr. Jernigan, and how he was blind, but he was an adult and he could talk and he could be independent. And so, I just find that kind of interesting that the first... And I never, I never did meet him, but you know, that was kind of our family's, I guess, introduction to adult blind. And, then you know, again I guess, I don't know if this needs to be edited out because of names. Before I ever started to school I always had this habit I would poke my eyes. And, my parents had been put in touch with the Webb family from up around Burlington, Dick Webb.

Duvall: Yes, I know Dick.

Hoenig: And we, they made me go up there one time to visit with them, with the Webbs. And, the thing that they always kept telling me was, "Now, that Dickey Webb, he always sits with his hands in his lap; he doesn't poke his eyes." So, just, some are just a couple early memories of, you know, that my parents didn't have a lot of expertise in, you know, Psychology or education or blindness. But, even before I started into school they were trying to reach out and learn what they could about other blind people. And, I guess one of the reasons I mention is it's kind of a fun memory, but it's

**also, I think it just stresses the importance of why we have to keep these connections going with multi-generations of blind people that, you know, now that we don't really have a residential school; that we have to figure out how to keep connecting families with capable adult blind people. So that they know that, you know, blindness isn't like the kiss of death or something.**

**Duvall: Absolutely. Well, one of the things that has always spoken well of you, is that you have good posture. You do not walk like you're on a rocking horse and those are all blindisms that, you know, as a sighted person, working with blind individuals, you get tired of correcting all the time. I mean, you really feel like a mean person after a while when you do the, "Sit up straight," "Put your hands in your lap." "Quit wandering all over my desk," you know, "with your fingers." And, a lot of blindisms are repulsive, very repulsive; touching our face, touching your eye. Some people suck their thumb and hide it under a hanky or something, oh yeah. There's many, I suppose, they are comforting gestures, or stimulating. When you poke yourself in the eye do you see stars?**

**Hoenig: No, I don't know. It was probably comforting; I don't know.**

**Duvall: If I poke myself in the eye I see stars. (Laughter)**

**Hoenig: I still occasionally find myself doing this, but I don't, I used to jab.**

**Duvall: Ooo, nasty!**

**Hoenig: Yeah, it was nasty. But, it's so true we were...Just recently I came in contact with another blind person, with a co-worker, and I asked how the person looked, because the person has been ill. And she said, that was the first thing that she said.**

**1:00:00**

**Hoenig: And, I mean, I had no idea that this person did this, but she said, "Well, he must not have been prompted in the social," I don't know what word she was talking about, picking, or, you know, whatever. And so, I don't know. Those are the things that we...And, I'm sure that I do things too that I don't even think about, that I'm doing that, and people have felt comfortable enough to correct. I know I do this little thing once in a while with flipping my fingers, and I have no idea where that came from. But, you know, when I'm conscious that I do it, I catch myself and stop. But, you know, it's; and that's one thing nice about, like, if you're at a meeting, you know, taking notes or something. It keeps your hands busy so you're not doing that. (Laughter)**

**Duvall: Well, I think we have covered most of the things that I wanted to. And, if you don't have any additional remarks or anything, why, we'll stop.**

**Hoenig: No, I think I have a question. I'm just curious. I don't know if this needs to even be on the tape, but I'm curious. I was explaining this project to a lady on the bus, actually, on the way over, you know, about the exhibit and**



**everything. Do these actually get transcribed word for word or?**

**Duvall: Yes.**

**Hoenig: Oh, my gosh!**

**Duvall: I know it. And that's, that is, I've listened to them and now I have the transcript and I'm going through and making sure that people's names are spelled correctly, capitalization and all of that is correct; and some people have cuss words in theirs, you know.**

**Hoenig: Oh good! No, I'm kidding.**

**Duvall: They're trying to remember and they'll say, "Who the hell was that," you know, "What was his name." And, then when you see that in print, you say, oh, I don't want to be known as the person who...**

**Hoenig: Said, "Take that out!" So, I'm going to, well, this has been a long interview so I'm going to have quite a long thing.**

**Duvall: Yes, and you can ask to have those things taken out.**

**Hoenig: I doubt that I will. I mean, it's just natural.**

**Duvall: That's the other thing. The way we talk and the way we like to see the printed word are almost two different languages.**

**Hoenig: I suppose.**

**Duvall: Yes, they are.**

**Hoenig: I guess, my only other comment is that I just, I really, I'm glad that this is happening. I think that this is capturing...And, I hope that there will be a time in the future when you know ten or twenty years down the line there will be a whole new group of players. And, I hope that this will be an ongoing process and some way or other, because I think that, I mean, it's been really fun for me to be a part of it; just to start to think about some of these memories, and you know, things that are important to me. And, it kind of feels good that people care enough to want to ask about it, you know.**

**Duvall: Well, I love to talk to people, and you do, too. And so, you put the two of us in a room, with or without a tape recorder, and we will keep ourselves occupied.**

**Hoenig: Yes, absolutely.**

**Duvall: Not a problem. Okay.**

**Hoenig: Thanks.**

**(End of Recording)**

**1:04:13**

**Beverly Tietz**

**5-6-11**